

STEP FORWARD: FIGHT STIGMA

Authors:

MARCUS SHAW¹, SHARMILA RADHA KRISHNAN¹, MAIREAD GRANT¹

¹WAAC, Perth, Western Australia, Australia, ²Hueman Media, Montagu Bay, Tasmania, Australia

Background/Purpose:

Despite medical progress in HIV treatment, social stigma persists, causing discrimination against people living with HIV (PLHIV). Combating stigma requires empathy, however, brief interventions make this challenging. To address this, a campaign was developed, which aimed to: (1) increase knowledge of the physical and social impact and experience of living with HIV; (2) increase awareness of current HIV landscape and individual health outcomes, (3) increase visibility and normalisation of HIV within mainstream and social media; and (4) shift perceptions of HIV and PLHIV.

Approach:

The "Step Forward: Fight Stigma" campaign utilised a narrative video format, where people living with a chronic health condition and PLHIV participated in a spectrum/continuum activity. By using real people, the interviews were completely unscripted, and the responses and reactions were authentic, leading to a deeply meaningful and richer piece of work. The campaign was shaped by feedback from PLHIV to ensure appropriateness and to amplify their voices.

Outcomes/Impact:

The campaign was widely distributed in the Perth metropolitan area and WA through social media, online media, billboards, venues, posters, and large format screens. Evaluation results showed that a majority of participants reported a better understanding of HIV, increased intention to combat HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and changes in perception towards HIV. The campaign was shared and received support from the National Association of People with HIV Australia, Health Equity Matters, and the Australian Medical Association WA.

Innovation and Significance:

This campaign effectively normalised living with HIV by comparing it to living with other chronic health conditions, a connection not previously explored in WA by highlighting the disparity in social treatment faced by PLHIV. Ongoing and more targeted efforts are critical to address stigma and discrimination; given the campaign's success, future adaptations will target specific populations to address social perceptions of HIV.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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